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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0388  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0174  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
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SUBJECT: END OF WEEK UPDATE ON FDTL DISMISSALS AND UNREST IN DILI

REF: A) DILI 96, B) DILI 113, C) DILI 135 D) DILI 144

DILI 00000152 001.2 OF 002

11. (U) Summary: As of today, the situation in Dili remains calm and appears to have mostly returned to normal after the spate of incidences reported in Reftel D. Dili residents who had left their homes to stay with relatives or take refuge elsewhere out of fear of escalating violence, a number that was never as many as exaggerated press reports implied, have mostly returned to their homes. Embassy sources have been unanimous in characterizing the unrest as primarily a martial arts group-driven phenomenon, not involving the dismissed Timorese armed forces (FDTL) soldiers except in a few isolated incidents.

Government officials continue to characterize the incidents as a law enforcement issue that they are capable of managing and expressed frustration and anger with highly inaccurate international press reports. Meanwhile, the 591 dismissed FDTL soldiers have reportedly dispersed since Monday, March 27, but their leader expressed sadness and disappointment that they are being "treated like criminals" and that no progress has been made regarding their complaints. Government of East Timor (GOET) officials are unsympathetic, but at the same time stress the need to address the FDTL's institutional issues. End summary.

12. (U) As reported in reftel D, numerous incidents involving primarily intimidation and property destruction (mostly rock throwing) occurred late last week and over the weekend in several Dili neighborhoods. The incidents appear to have been primarily carried out by members of martial arts groups using increased publicity regarding tensions between people from the eastern and western areas of East Timor as a pretext for their actions. The incidents, and especially the proliferation of rumors about impending violence that they sparked, raised fears throughout the city and in some districts. However, incidents were reduced significantly during the week, at least partially due to widespread police patrols, and Dili's infamous rumor mill has died down allowing a return to normality.

13. (U) The incidents and related rumors had prompted a number of people to take temporary shelter away from their homes in the affected neighborhoods. As of today, however, Embassy sources indicate that the vast majority of Dili residents have returned to their homes, with the exception of several whose houses sustained damage rendering them uninhabitable. Embassy staff who had taken in family and friends, report that everyone has

now returned home. A Catholic Church compound that was housing approximately 200 people earlier in the week now only has a few families left.

¶4. (U) In numerous conversations throughout the week, Embassy sources have been unanimous in characterizing the disturbances around Dili as the work of martial arts groups, citing two of the larger groups, SHT and Sete-Sete, as primarily responsible. The general view is that this was not an orchestrated effort, but rather the work of a number of the group's members using the pretext for their own personal motives, such as revenge, theft, etc.

¶5. (U) In an apparently impromptu speech Thursday morning (March 30), Foreign Minister Jose Ramos Horta appeared noticeably upset and blasted the international press for "irresponsible, alarmist, and downright deceitful" reporting on the week's events. Singled out in his criticisms were Agence France Press, ABC (Australia), Lusa (Portugal) and Antara (Indonesia). He also targeted the media development organization, Internews, whose international director had been quoted in several of the international stories, remarking also on its funding via USAID. (N.B. Although the international director of Internews in Dili was quoted in inaccurate stories, his quotes were themselves not inaccurate and he does not appear to be the source for the inaccuracies.) While Ramos Horta's outburst was the most sharp-edged of official responses to date by far, it reflects the overall Government of East Timor (GOET) view that the incidents were not a major source of concern and that they had been blown far out of proportion.

¶6. (U) Meanwhile, the dismissed FDTL soldiers have not been actively gathering or making any plans since Monday. According to the Lieutenant Salsinha who has been acting as their leader so far, he asked them to disperse and to remain calm. He said that many have returned to their homes in the districts. He also expressed great frustration and said that he and the other dismissed soldiers are "feeling very sad" because "some people

DILI 00000152 002.2 OF 002

are accusing them of creating instability." The group apparently has no plan formed at this point regarding any next steps.

¶7. (SBU) GOET officials, including the Prime Minister, continue to publicly support the decision to dismiss the 591 striking soldiers. However, according to private conversations conveyed by Embassy sources, Foreign Minister Ramos Horta and Minister of State Administration Anna Pessoa (who is very close to Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri) have both separately remarked on the need to address the institutional issues within the military that led to the strike of over one third of the force. Both also reportedly are planning to establish special commissions to address the long-term institutional issues.

SHIRATORI